

Message Text

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SUBJECT: BASQUE STATE OF EXCEPTION: TWO MORE

POLICEMEN ASSASSINATED

REF: MADRID 2858

SUMMARY: SINCE IMPOSITION STATE OF EXCEPTION APRIL 25, GOVT APPEARS BE ATTEMPTING CRACK DOWN HARD ON ETA, AND POLICE HAVE ANNOUNCED ARRESTS OF 57 PRESUMED ETA TERRORISTS. DESPITE THIS, TWO NEW ASSASSINATIONS OF POLICEMEN OCCURRED IN GUERNACA AND BILBAO ON MAY 6 AND MAY 7, THUS FURTHER HEIGHTENING TENSION IN BASQUE COUNTRY. END SUMMARY

1. FIFTH AND SIXTH ASSASSINATIONS OF POLICEMEN IN BASQUE COUNTRY HAVE JUST OCCURRED, DESPITE IMPOSITION OF STATE OF EXCEPTION TWO WEEKS AGO (REFTEL). ON MAY 6 A GUARDIA CIVIL ON DUTY IN HISTORIC BASQUE TOWN OF GUERNICA WAS MACHINE GUNNED TO DEATH BY TERRORISTS, AND ON MAY 7 A BILBOA POLICEMAN WAS SHOT TO DEATH ON HIS DOORSTEP. BOTH ARE PRESUMED TO HAVE BEEN ETA ASSASSINATIONS.

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2. PRESS REACTION HAS ROUNDLY CONDEMNED RECENT POLICE

ASSASSINATIONS AND HAS GENERALLY ENDORSED STATE OF EXCEPTION IN BOTH PROVINCES AS NECESSARY UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THOUGH MADRID'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC "YA" POLITELY DESCRIBED GOVT MEASURE AS OVERREACTION.

3. CONSUL IN BILBAO REPORTS THAT, ALTHOUGH MORE POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN IN EVIDENCE, PARTICULARLY AROUND MAY 1, GENERAL ATMOSPHERE IN BASQUE PROVINCES APPEARS BE "BUSINESS AS USUAL", SINCE BASQUES HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO FREQUENT EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES BY CENTRAL GOVT. (THIS OCCASION IS SIXTH TIME SINCE 1967 THAT ONE OR MORE GUARANTEES HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED IN BASQUE AREA. HE ALSO REPORTS THAT AMONG ELEMENTS AND SECTORS IN BASQUE PROVINCES MOST OPPOSED TO CENTRAL GOVT, STATE OF EXCEPTION APPEARS HAVE CREATED MOOD OF SULLEN RESIGNATION, PERHAPS MOST NOTABLE IN CERTAIN WORKING CLASS AREAS. ALL STRIKE ACTIVITY AND LABOR AGITATION IN TWO PROVINCES AFFECTED APPEARS HAVE COME TO AN ABRUPT HALT. INTERIOR MINISTER CARCIA HERNANDEZ, IN COMMENT TO CADIZ NEWSPAPER MAY 6, ASSURED THAT STATE OF EXCEPTION NOT DIRECTED AGAINST BASQUE POPULATION BUT AGAINST "RESIDUAL GROUPS" THAT ARE CAUSING INCIDENTS.

4. PRESS REPORTS EXTENSIVE ARRESTS IN TWO AFFECTED PROVINCES SINCE IMPOSITION STATE OF EXCEPTION. POLICE ON MAY 6 ANNOUNCED ARRESTS 57 ALLEGED ETA SUSPECTS AND ON MAY 7 ARRESTS 25 ALLEGED WORKERS COMMISSIONS MEMBERS. TOTAL NUMBER OF DETAINEES UNDER STATE OF EXCEPTION ACCORDING SOME SOURCES MAY NOW BE IN 400-500 RANGE.

5. FOLLOWING MAY 7 KILLING, ULTRA-RIGHTIST GROUPS STAGED SEVERAL FIRE-BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND OTHER COUNTER-TERRORIST ACTS AGAINST PERSONS AND BUSINESSES BELIEVED TO BE LINKED TO ETA. AT MAY 10, COUNCIL OF MINISTERS GOVT AGAIN VOWED TO REPRESS TERRORISM WITH ALL AVAILABLE MEANS.

6. COMMENT: GOVT APPEARS TO BE MAKING AN EXTENSIVE EFFORT UNDER TEMPORARY POWERS CONFERRED UPON IT BY STATE OF EXCEPTION TO ELIMINATE ETA TERRORISM ONCE AND FOR ALL. ALL PREVIOUS SUCH EFFORTS, WHICH HAVE EVEN RESULTED IN PAST IN DEATHS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN SHOOTOUTS OF SOME TOP ETA LEADERS, HAVE NEVER PRODUCED DESIRED RESULTS, AS NEW ETA LEADERS HAVE ALWAYS STEPPED FORTH TO REPLACE THEM. AS LONG AS FRENCH AUTHORITIES, FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL REASONS, REFUSE TO EXTRADITE ETA MEMBERS OR TO COOPERATE WITH SPANISH AUTHORITIES IN ELIMINATING ETA'S LONG-ESTABLISHED FRENCH SANCTUARIES, ETA AND ITS TERRORIST TACTICS APPEAR LIKELY TO CONTINUE DESPITE GOVT'S EXTENSIVE REPRESSIVE MEASURES.

7. LATEST ASSASSINATIONS ON MAY 6 AND 7 APPEAR DESIGNED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT, DESPITE STATE OF EXCEPTION, ETA IS STILL IN EXISTENCE WITH FULL CAPABILITY TO CONTINUE ITS TERRORIST ACTS. SOME OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, BELIEVE ASSASSINATIONS COULD REPRESENT DESPERATE ACTS BY AN ORGANIZATION WHICH MAY BE SUFFERING SUBSTANTIAL LOSSES AT THE HANDS OF POLICE AND SECURITY FORCES.
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